

WASHINGTON, DC – March 31, 2007 marks another year where countless Americans throughout the country will celebrate César Chávez's birthday and lifetime of accomplishments. Let us remember the legacy of César Chávez, one of the greatest civil rights leaders in American history. His devotion to the advancement of all Americans has left an indelible mark on the hearts and minds of our great nation.

César Chávez Day was established to honor his legacy; a Hispanic American civil rights advocate and labor organizer who helped change the working conditions and lives of America's migrant farm workers. Many know him as the founder of the United Farm Workers of America (UFW), the first successful farm workers in American history. For more than three decades, César Chávez led the UFW, achieving dignity, respect, fair wages, medical coverage, pension benefits, and humane living conditions, as well as countless other rights and protections for hundreds to thousands of farm workers.

A strong proponent of the principles of non-violence practiced by Gandhi and Martin Luther King, Jr., as well as being successful in employing peaceful demonstrations through fasts, boycotts, strikes, and pilgrimages, has earned him the Medal of Freedom in 1994, the highest civilian honor in the United States. His leadership on behalf of workers helped achieve the first industry-wide labor contracts in the history of American agriculture and brought about the passage of the groundbreaking 1975 California Agriculture Labor Relations Act to protect farm workers. Today, this remains the only law in the nation that protects farm workers' rights to unionize.

As a child of strawberry sharecroppers in California in the 1950's, I share César's belief of social and economic justice for those who labor in the fields picking the food for our table. Let us honor César as a humble leader who fought for social change and serves as an inspiration to all Americans and people throughout the world.